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Live and let live

Manchester

1875

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LIVE AND LET LIVE. 1.5

THE
SHOPKEEPER
AND THE
CO-OPERATOR.



MANCHESTER:
NORTH OF ENGLAND CO-OPERATIVE PRINTING SOCIETY,
15, BALLOON-STREET, CORPORATION-STREET.

1875.

LIVE AND LET LIVE.

"Well, Jim, I haven't seen you for an age; how is it you never come our way now?"

"Well, you see, Mr. Johnson, I belong to the co-operative store, so I don't need to come your way on Saturday nights."

"What! you don't mean to say a respectable man like you would join that set of shabby fellows, that want to rob an honest shopkeeper of his living?"

"Well, I don't see, Mr. Johnson, that there's anything so very shabby about them. They have got a very decent shop, and a very tidy lot of articles in it, though they have had a little rusty bacon sometimes."

"Oh! I don't mean that the shop is shabby, but the people who set it up, and grudge a respectable shopkeeper his honest living. 'Live and let live,' I say; I don't want to take any honest man's bread out of his mouth. I don't want to take away your tools that you earn your living with; why should you wish to take away my tools, which help me to get my living? My shop and the goods in it are my tools, just as much as the saw and the plane are your tools; and I don't see but what my work is as honest as yours."

"I know, Mr. Johnson, that you have got a point there which seems to give you a handle against us. But there's a higher morality coming to rule the world by-and-by, I heard a lecturer say the other day. The old morality was 'Each man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost.'"

"No Jim, that's wrong; it's 'Each man for himself, and God for us all!'"

"Well, I don't see that makes much difference as far as I am concerned. The question with me is whether God puts it into my heart to help my neighbour, or whether the devil puts it into my head to help myself, and leave my neighbour to go—anywhere. But, as I was saying, the old morality, 'Live and let live,' won't do for some of us, we want a higher morality, 'Live for others, live for humanity.'"

"Oh, Jim, that's all bosh, you can't care about humanity."

"Excuse me, Mr. Johnson, it isn't all bosh; and I do care about humanity, and so do you. Don't you go to church—or to chapel, isn't it?"

"Yes; I go to hear Mr. Obediah Heavyspeke, at Ebenezer Chapel, and a very excellent preacher he is."

"Well, he sometimes reads the New Testament; doesn't he?"

"I should think so, indeed."

"About Jesus of Nazareth dying to save mankind? Didn't he care about humanity?"

"Ah! but, we cannot all be like Christ—that is to say, not exactly like Christ."

"But we can be like him so far that we can love humanity."

"Oh, hush, Jim; don't talk like that."

"Well, I am sure it is worse to make Christ's words of no effect—and his work too—as you do. I am sure the New Testament teaches us plainly enough that Christ came to set us an example. A pig would say, if he could speak, that he is sure that no one can care much about a yard of painted canvas; and so people who have no more power of loving humanity than a pig will say people can't love humanity. But we do love humanity—all of us—and you do. If you found a woman under the hedge outside your garden dying with hunger, with a baby in her arms, you'd care about her though you never saw her before, and were never likely to see her again."

"But what has all this to do with my shop, and you co-operators taking the bread out of my mouth, and leaving my children to starve, or to come on the parish?"

"Well, you see, the higher morality is not so easily explained in two or three words in all its bearings. Co-operation, as I heard it said the other day, is the first 'practical application'—I think it was—of the higher morality. The old morality said only, 'Thou shalt not'—'thou shalt not steal'—thou shalt not murder, and so on. The new morality says: 'In all you do, try to make your fellow-men happy.'"

"But it is not making me happy to ruin my business."

"No, Mr. Johnson; and, perhaps, it isn't making the doctor happy to keep everybody in good health, so that he shall never take a fee; and it is not making the publicans happy to get all the people to sign the pledge. A shop is an affair in which all the customers are concerned as much as the shopkeeper. It makes as much difference to me what sort of things I buy at your shop, and what I pay for them, as it does to you what sort of things you sell, and what you get for them. So, for a shop to be carried on only for the benefit of the shopkeeper must be wrong. Where two or three hundred people are concerned, to consider only what will suit one of them cannot be fair. You could not think it right to stop the railway train for an hour at one place, and keep all the passengers waiting, just for the fireman to finish his pint of beer, or for the guard to have his talk out with his sweetheart. Is it not just as reasonable for the shop to be carried on for the benefit of the customers as for the train to be run for the convenience of the passengers?"

"But why don't you do your carpentering work for humanity? Why is it not as base for you to work for money as for me to keep my shop for the sake of profit?"

"Well, I should only be glad enough to do carpentering for humanity. All the work I do is useful; I wish I could make it more useful. When co-operation is properly understood, all carpenters and bricklayers, and all sorts of workmen will work for humanity, and will feel that they are working for humanity."

"But won't they be paid for their work?"

"Well, I don't say exactly that, but I do say they won't work for their pay—that is to say, merely for their pay. A man who works merely for pay seems to me a mere hireling, and so with the writer or speaker who lets out the powers of his mind for gain or for fame."

"But, after all, Jim, how is your co-operative store going to make people happy?"

"Well, you see, happiness is a thing it's not quite easy to get to the bottom of. If your Reverend Obediah Heavy-

speke would teach us about happiness—what it is, and how to get it, I would go to hear him preach."

"Ah! Jim, he does tell us about happiness—about true happiness; happiness beyond the grave."

"God can make you and me and our neighbours happy beyond the grave; but I think I can do a little here—or I could do a little if some wise man would teach me how—to make my neighbours happier in this life."

"But you have not told me how the store is going to make your neighbours happy."

"I hope it will teach them to understand one another. Don't you see what a different world this would be if people understood one another? Don't you call the beginning of a quarrel, a misunderstanding? If we understood one another we could never have misunderstandings, so there would be no quarrels at all."

"But there are some people not worth understanding—people who have nothing in them but falsehood and brutality—people who care only to get all they can for themselves, and to make other people miserable."

"Well, no, Mr. Johnson, I hope there are not any people quite like that. I am inclined to think everybody has something good in them; and if we understood one another we should know how to get the good out of one another—how to develop the good elements of character in one another—as I think I saw once in some book. I believe all our co-operative failures are owing to our not understanding one another. There was the store over at Cowbridge, years ago, that went on about eighteen months. Some people thought Mr. Jones was the best secretary, others thought Mr. Smith would do better. Mr. Jones had his heart in the cause, but had no gift for business—could not add up a column of figures. Mr. Smith was a clever man, but not quite careful and regular enough; he would make mistakes sometimes, which people would not put up with, because he was rather overbearing now and then. Then they could not manage the buying well; each one of the committee thought he knew the most about it, and they suspected the shopman of taking tips from the Wholesale

people. Now, if they could have understood one another they would have known better just what each man was best able to do, and they would have helped each other to find out, each for himself, what he was best able to do."

"Oh! I don't think there's much understanding one another or caring for one another in your co-operation, Jim; it's just each one for himself, like the rest of the world. Why, your *Co-operative News* is always complaining that co-operators don't care for anything but 'divi.'"

"Yes, there's a deal of truth in that, I know, but then they need to understand one another to get their dividend; and if people can learn to understand one another about getting dividend, they will be able to work together in getting things far better than dividend."

"But don't you think, Jim, that I do anything in my shop to make people happier? Of course tea and sugar, butter and bacon, are not everything that goes to make a man happy, even in this world; but you know very well that all these trifles help to make up what we call comfort, which is at best some part of happiness. Now, if I do my very best to serve people with good articles at the lowest price—and I could sell things a good deal cheaper if they'd treat me as they treat the co-operative store—pay me ready money—and I'm sure I know a great deal better where to buy than those co-operative fellows—don't you think, if I do this, that I shall be working for humanity?"

"Certainly, Mr. Johnson, you will be a far better co-operator than most of our members. But even if you did the greatest service possible to your customers, you could not put them through the moral culture they may get out of a co-operative store. I admit that it is but a little that our best co-operative stores do in the way of moral training, but that little will lead, I hope, to something better. If each of our members can be made to feel that he is doing something for his fellow-members, or even honestly trying to do something for them, that seems to me of more consequence than getting the best articles in the world at the lowest price, or even getting them for nothing."

"Well, Jim, I am very glad to have had this talk with you. I certainly never thought before of co-operation as 'moral culture'—a kind of talk you must have learnt from some of your lecturers, I should think. I shall be very glad to find it's something more than talk. I should be glad enough to live in a country where everybody worked honestly and heartily for the good of humanity, whether the people called themselves co-operators or anything else. When I'm quite sure that most of you co-operators mean, by co-operation, working for humanity—and I'm quite sure that a good many of them now mean something quite different—I will turn co-operator myself. E. W.

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